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Cover photo by Sorin Brinzei

Pursue the Mystery

"Our real journey in life is interior. It is a matter of growth, deepening, and of an ever greater surrender to the creative action of love and grace in our hearts."

~ Thomas Merton

This past summer I visited the Abbaye de Senanque, a Cistercian abbey in the south of France, founded in the 12th century. It sits alone in a secluded and very small valley, accessible on a winding country road. It's not far from local villages, yet it's peacefully isolated from the distractions of society. The beauty and tranquility of this setting are profound, and the urge to linger before returning to the cacophony of life was strong. (I was not able to stay for a retreat but retreatants are welcome. See the abbey's web site at www.senanque.fr.)

Our son asked us this perennial question: Why do people become monks? The abbey offers this response:

"To quote the title of a famous book, there is a "Monastic mystery." Why does anyone become a monk, or more to the point, why does anyone want to be a monk? What could have made these men leave usually comfortable lives for a destiny that, from the outside, appears dull and monotonous?

"No two answers are ever the same. Each person has a unique and mysterious past. But each of them has had a

real encounter with an "Other" who turns out to be He that is called God and who prevails over everything. Life then becomes a response of love to the Word of love. The call, heard at the bottom of the heart, is absolute. It asks you to leave everything behind and pursue the Mystery that is full of both light and darkness.

"This is not a privilege reserved only for monks, however. It is offered to all men, because God wants "to save all men so that they can attain the knowledge of truth." It is possible to perceive a "foretaste" of this mystery by starting to pray, however short or modest the prayer may be, since prayer makes it possible to begin a living and loving relationship with God. From then on, an endless journey begins, which becomes increasingly profound for he who wishes it so."

As always in *SACRED JOURNEY*, we offer readings here that explore this "endless journey," through prayer, meditation, and service to others in a variety of faith traditions. Rabbi Rami Shapiro, in our "Feature" (pg. 4) writes about the universal, and essential, need to nurture lovingkindness toward ourselves, and God, and all humanity. Pema Chödrön (pg. 20) discusses the challenge of becoming "comfortable with uncertainty" on the journey to spiritual awakening. Meredith Jordan (pg. 36) ponders the challenge to "become better in the soul" by welcoming all opportunities for spiritual growth, no matter how difficult or frightening. We hope that these, and all the writings in this issue, will support, encourage, and enrich your own unique spiritual journey.

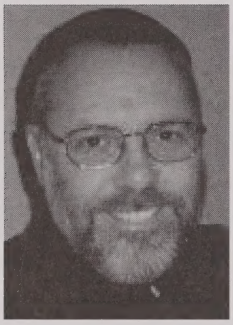
"It is not enough to be versed in only one religion. You are heir to the entire spectrum of human spirituality. . . you can learn from them all and adapt practices from each to enrich your own capacity for lovingkindness."

~ Rami Shapiro

OUR FEATURE

What Is Lovingkindness?

Rami Shapiro



"It's a bit embarrassing to have been concerned with the human problem all one's life and find at the end that one has no more to offer [by way of advice] than this: Try to be a little kinder."

~ Aldous Huxley

Rabbi Rami Shapiro is an award-winning poet and essayist whose liturgical writings are used in prayer services throughout North America. While grounded in Jewish spiritual teachings, Rami bridges traditions and brings an interfaith dimension to the human quest for wisdom. Rabbi Rami is a spiritual entrepreneur working to transform religion in the world and thus to transform the world through religion.

A congregation rabbi for twenty years, he now works full-time on his writing, teaching, and directing the One River Foundation which he founded. The Foundation (www.one-river.org) is a not-for-profit educational organization promoting interspirituality, peace, and personal spiritual awakening through study, prayer, dialogue, and contemplative practice. It promotes no specific religion nor theology, believing that human beings are heir not only to the teachings of their birth

cultures, but to all the world's wisdom; that the sacred books of the world were given to the world through particular peoples and prophets and not given solely to those peoples and prophets; that by learning from the texts, teachings, and teachers of the world's great wisdom traditions we will find a common ground on which to build a diverse global civilization rooted in a foundation of trust, respect, justice, compassion, humility, and the sacredness of life.

Rabbi Rami's current efforts also include: Simply Jewish Manifesto, *a catalyst for the reinvention of Judaism for the 21st century;* WisdomKeepers, *a documentary film on contemporary American mystics;* Spiritual Legacy, *a "great books" salon exploring the perennial wisdom of the world's religions; and* Path & Pen, *promoting writing as a spiritual practice. He has written over a dozen works of poetry, liturgy, short story fiction, and nonfiction. He is a graduate of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, and holds a doctoral degree in religious studies from Union Graduate School. His books include* Open Secrets; Minyan: 10 Principles for Living a Life of Integrity; Wisdom of the Jewish Sages; Proverbs; *and* The Way of Solomon.

For more on Rabbi Rami, visit his web site at www.rabbirami.com. We share with you here some of Rabbi Rami's thoughts on the universal topic of lovingkindness:

Will you engage this moment with kindness or with cruelty, with love or with fear, with generosity or scarcity, with a joyous heart or an embittered one?

This is your choice and no one can make it for you. If you choose kindness, love, generosity, and joy, then you will discover in that choice the Kingdom of God, heaven, nirvana, this-worldly salvation. If you choose cruelty, fear, scarcity, and bitterness, then you will discover in that choice

the hellish states of which so many religions speak. These are not ontological realities tucked away somewhere in space—these are existential realities playing out in your own mind. Heaven and hell are both inside of you. It is your choice that determines just where you will reside.

I made the choice for heaven, and having done so, I went in search of tools for living it. As a rabbi it was only natural for me to look first to Judaism in search of these tools, and what I found there provides the skeleton for what you will read here. Judaism speaks of Thirteen Attributes, or aspects, of Lovingkindness.

The attributes come from the book of Exodus. Moses asks to see God's glory, how godliness is manifest in the world (Exodus 33:18). God passes before Moses and calls out each aspect of goodness in turn: (1) realizing the divinity of self, (2) realizing the divinity of other, (3) cultivating creativity, (4) engendering compassion, (5) finding grace, (6) acting with equanimity, (7) creating kindness, (8) bringing forth truth, (9) preserving kindness, (10) forgiving iniquity, (11) forgiving willfulness, (12) forgiving error, and (13) cleansing yourself of delusion. Together these are called the Thirteen Attributes of Lovingkindness.

These attributes of lovingkindness are chanted during various worship services, especially during the High Holy Days of Rosh HaShana (the Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). This is to remind worshipers of God's infinite compassion and their obligation to manifest it in their own lives.

Outside of communal prayer, the Thirteen Attributes are used as a mantra for private meditation. In my daily meditation practice, I chant these attributes in Hebrew over and over, inviting them to take root in my psyche and transform me in their service. In addition to chanting

all thirteen, I often focus on one attribute each week, giving special attention to the practices associated with it, so that I might continually strengthen my capacity to live this aspect of lovingkindness. At the end of a thirteen-week cycle, I begin all over again.

No one religion has a monopoly on lovingkindness, and each has something to offer those who have made the choice for heaven. I encourage you to study broadly in the world's religions and adapt what you need from wherever it is found.

It is not enough to be versed in only one religion. You are heir to the entire spectrum of human spirituality. While one of them may resonate more strongly within you than another, you can learn from them all and adapt practices from each to enrich your own capacity for lovingkindness.

It is vital that you know who you are if you are to live with lovingkindness. You cannot fake lovingkindness. Authentic lovingkindness is the natural response to the simple truth of your being one with all beings in, with, and as God. You are God manifest as you. This is why the first of the Thirteen Attributes of Lovingkindness is Y-H-V-H [The Name of God]; to remind you who you really are: God. Or as the Upanishads put it, *tat tvam assi,* Thou art That.

There is no better statement of the first attribute than this one written by the kabbalist Abraham Abulafia in the thirteenth century, "Behold you are God and God is you; for you are so intimately adhering to God that you cannot by any means be separate from God, for you are God. See now that I, even I, am God. He is I and I am He."

The kabbalist is speaking from the perspective of *mochin d'gadlut,* spacious mind, rather than *mochin d'katnut,* narrow mind. These terms come from the vocabulary of the Hasidim, the Eastern European Jewish mystics of the

eighteenth century. While I am in no way suggesting a historical link between the Hasidim of Poland and the Buddhist sages of Asia, it is interesting to note that both traditions employ these terms and do so in similar ways.

Narrow mind imagines itself as separate from the world. It is isolated, often alienated, and sees the world as a zero-sum game in which its success depends on another's failure. Scarcity defines the world of *mochin d'katnut;* fear is its primary emotion and anger its most common expression.

Spacious mind, in both Judaism and Buddhism, sees the self as part of the Whole: *I am in the Father and the Father is in me.* As such, spacious mind engages life from a place of interdependence and compassion. Abundance is the hallmark of the world as *mochin d'gadlut* perceives it. As such, love rather than fear is its emotional foundation, and lovingkindness rather than anger is its defining characteristic. As we cultivate the Thirteen Attributes of Lovingkindness found in this book we continually shift from narrow mind to spacious mind. Spacious mind does not negate narrow mind, but embraces and includes it in a larger vision. In this way your sense of self is freed from fear and anger, and you are empowered to engage the world with your own unique expression of lovingkindness.

Jesus is talking about the same thing in the Gospel according to John:

> Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. (John 14:8-10)

In this passage, Philip sees neither the true nature of Jesus nor the true nature of himself. He still imagines

God is other rather than all. The Name of God, the *yod-hey-vav-hey* that is manifest as your body, is a form of the Hebrew verb *to be*. God is not a being, or even a supreme being; God is being itself. All that was, is, and will be is God. And, since God is also called *Ayin*, the Nothing that includes all things, nonbeing and being are both God. God is what is and what isn't at each and every moment. Or, to use a term from Buddhism, God is *tathata*, Suchness, Reality—in you, around you, as you.

Philip wants Jesus to point to God, whereas Jesus knows he and we are God. "You want to look at something and call it God," Jesus is saying in effect. "Then look at me. I am in God and God is in me. God is all of me, though I am not all of God. Just as the ocean is all of the wave and yet the wave is not all of the ocean, so you and I and all things are God, just not all of God."

This is what it means to be the image of God. But not yet the likeness. Jesus is trying to teach Philip, and through Philip, each of us, that to know you are God is not enough; you have to act godly as well. This is why the second of the Thirteen Attributes is also Y-H-V-H, to remind you that everything else is God as well.

When we see the world as Philip did, when we see the world from the perspective of narrow mind, we see diversity without unity. We might have an inkling that we are God, but we have no idea that the other is God as well. Things appear discrete, independent, and competing. The world seems dominated by the idea of "looking out for number one." Living is "dog eat dog." Success is a zero-sum game: If I am to win, then you must lose.

When we see the world as Jesus did, however, when we see the world from the perspective of spacious mind,

we see a greater unity embracing and transcending diversity. The world is integral and interdependent. Looking out for number one is only possible when we look out for numbers two, three, and four as well. Hence the *bodhisattva* vow, "Though sentient beings are innumerable, I vow to save them all."

There is nothing wrong with narrow mind. It, too, is a manifestation of God, and a necessary one at that. As Jesus' rabbinic contemporary, Hillel, said some two millennia ago, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" Narrow mind is all about being for yourself. The problem arises only when taking care of yourself is done at the expense of others.

Spacious mind speaks to the second half of Hillel's aphorism, "If I am only for myself, what am I?" Without spacious mind, you are fearful, anxious, alienated, and alone.

Spacious mind offers a different view: *See now that I, even I, am God. God is I and I am God.* It is to spacious mind that God speaks, saying, "Be holy, as I, God, am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). Before we can behave in a holy manner, however, we first have to see ourselves as holy. Unless and until we understand our true nature, we cannot act from that nature. As long as we are locked in narrow mind and cannot experience others and ourselves from the perspective of spacious mind, we can get nowhere.

The purpose of the first two attributes, the repetition of Y-H-V-H, is to awaken us to the innate and intrinsic holiness of all things. If God is all, God is also me and you.

One way to practice this is with the visualization using the tetragrammaton, the four-letter Name of God, Y-H-V-H, *yod-hey-vav-hey*. The Hebrew Name of God, when written vertically, takes on the shape of a human being. Each one of us is the Name of God incarnate: the *yod* is your head and face; the *hey* is your shoulders and arms; the

vav is your torso; and the final *hey* is your pelvis and legs.

Not too long ago I was teaching this visualization at an interfaith teenage leadership camp in central Tennessee. I asked the kids, who ranged in age from sixteen to nineteen, to show me how they walk during the day. I had them walk up and down the room and began to point out what I saw. Most of them were slouched, their eyes locked onto the floor. We went through the Name of God visualization exercise and I asked them to walk again, this time as an incarnation of the Divine.

Most of them walked with a sense of newfound grace, their bodies straight but not stiff, the eyes meeting the eyes of their fellow campers. But some walked as royalty, impervious to the needs and presence of others. This is the difference between knowing you are God and pretending you are God. Those who know are at ease with themselves and others. Those who pretend become pompous prigs.

I mentioned this, saying, "It is not enough to know you are God, to see the Name of God written with your body. You must also see the Name in everyone and everything else. There is a Jewish legend that says each of us has an angel who walks before us calling out, 'Behold the Image and Likeness of God.' You must honor your own angel and hear everyone else's angel as well. You must see yourself and the world as God manifest in time and space. And when you do, you will naturally engage life with grace, humor, and lovingkindness."

Real holiness is effortless. It is what the Taoists call *wu wei*, acting without coercion. You don't try to be kind or patient, you simply are kind and patient. Because you don't work at it, you take no credit for it. It is a gift. You receive it and share it.

I use this exercise during my daily prayer-walk. I begin

with the chanting of the Thirteen Attributes to awaken myself to the presence of God in, with, and as all reality. I visualize myself as Y-H-V-H, hearing my angel reminding me of my true nature as God manifest. Then I open myself a bit wider and see everything else as a manifestation as well. The trees, the crows, the squirrels, everything I meet, animate and inanimate, I see and experience as God.

At the least, I find myself feeling a great connection with all beings. Sometimes this connection is far more intense. The trees ask to be hugged; the sky embraces me; I find myself in conversation with birds, deer, dogs, and squirrels. While there are few people out walking at the same time, those I do meet seem to glow with the Name of God. I find myself spontaneously singing out Names of God in Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, and Sanskrit. I have this sense of loving and being loved by the entire world. Sometimes the love is so intense I can't walk, and simply whirl like a dervish, my arms extended to hug the world. Sometimes I cry with joy. I do not equate any of this with mystical experience, or, God forbid, enlightenment. This is simply a palpable encounter with God in and as all things.

Wake up each morning and stand in front of a mirror, seeing your body as the incarnate Name of God. As you go about your day, see everyone and everything as the Name as well. Listen for your angel announcing your true nature, and listen for the angels of others doing the same. In time you will break up the hard-packed soil of narrow mind and plant in it the seeds of lovingkindness that will soon grow and awaken in you the spacious mind that is your holy and most true self.

Excerpt is from The Sacred Art of Lovingkindness: Preparing to Practice © *2006 by Rami Shapiro. Permission granted by SkyLight Paths Publishing, www.skylightpaths.com.*

Robert F. Campbell

ILLUMINATIONS

I do not believe that sheer suffering teaches. If suffering alone taught, all the world would be wise, since everyone suffers. To suffering must be added mourning, understanding, patience, love, openness, and the willingness to remain vulnerable.

~ *Anne Morrow Lindberg*

Many of us spend our whole lives running from feeling, with the mistaken belief that you cannot bear the pain. But you have already borne the pain. What you have not done is feel all you are beyond that pain.

~ *Kahlil Gibran*

Our real journey in life is interior. It is a matter of growth, deepening, and of an ever greater surrender to the creative action of love and grace in our hearts.

~ *Thomas Merton*

Authentic joy is not a euphoric state or a feeling of being high. Rather, it is a state of appreciation that allows us to participate fully in our lives.

~ *Pema Chödrön*

Emptiness and fullness at first seem complete opposites. But in the spiritual life they are not. In the spiritual life we find the fulfillment of our deepest desires by becoming empty for God.

~ *Henri Nouwen*

Even the most exalted states and the most exceptional spiritual accomplishments are unimportant if we cannot be happy in the most basic and ordinary ways, if we cannot touch one another and the life we have been given with our hearts.

~ *Jack Kornfield*

Healing may not be so much about getting better, as about letting go of everything that isn't you—all of the expectations, all of the beliefs—and becoming who you are.

~ *Rachel Naomi Remen*

A religious man is a person who holds God and man in one thought at one time, at all times, who suffers harm done to others, whose greatest passion is compassion, whose greatest strength is love and defiance of despair.

~ *Abraham Joshua Heschel*

When you are offended at any man's fault, turn to yourself and study your own failings. Then you will forget your anger.

~ *Epictetus*

In nature there is fundamental unity running through all the diversity we see about us. Religions are given to mankind so as to accelerate the process of realization of fundamental unity.

~ *Gandhi*

All our advances in knowledge and power will prove fatal to us in the end unless we regain control over them by a corresponding advance in our spirituality.

~ *Albert Schweitzer*

Today I Turned Seventy

Eleanor Wiley

Wow!! I must say that, for me, seventy is a great big number. It's a wonderful number and a scary number all at the same time. It's wonderful because I am truly *alive*. Not just physically—I am alive spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. My life is filled with gifts, although I can't really say which one I cherish the most.

Wait—that's not true. I've just paused to let my mind rest without trying to figure it out and, yes, I can tell you.

I cherish being able to *be in the present moment.* When I stay there, I can be with everything that comes into my life—both the joy and the sorrow. Needless to say, I prefer the joy, but being able to stay present *with* the sorrow and the pain is the only way for me not to create more suffering.

I have a friend who is dying. I get to bring her lunch today. What a joy that will be. I will have one more opportunity to laugh with her and perhaps to cry with

Eleanor Wiley is an artist, an author, and a workshop leader. The Sacred Wheel of Peace, designed by Eleanor in 1999, is a symbol of diversity and inclusion, representing all traditions and cultures. The wheel is being widely accepted as "a place to begin" to be at peace with one another. She lectures on peace, diversity, and present moment practice. She exhibits nationally and internationally. She wrote this story on May 9, 2006—her seventieth birthday.

her—who knows? What is important is that I will have one more opportunity to be with her. I am learning to take pleasure in the moment. It's about what I have, and not about what I don't have.

Along with the present moment, what I treasure are my children. It has taken me many years to recognize my children as the amazing individuals they are, and not as extensions or reflections of me, or as images of what I thought they *should* be. I am comfortable with the path they have chosen, supporting them when I can and standing back when they need me to do that. Standing back is not something that is easy for me; it has taken seventy years to learn that skill, although I still mess up from time to time.

Turning seventy has definitely not made me perfect; it has just made me pretty good and that is enough. That's what staying in the present moment does for me; it allows me to be with the good moments as well as the not-so-thrilling ones. Opening myself to those not-so-thrilling ones is a gift I learned to accept (kicking and screaming) from my Buddhist teacher, Yvonne Rand. She has been on my journey to "Seventy" for many years. I cherish all of my teachers, from many traditions, for the opportunity to get to know them and to share the gifts of their spiritual journeys.

I have opened myself to the Namaste of all spiritual paths *(a Hindu salutation meaning "I bow to you" or "I honor the divine in you and the divine in me").* What a change from thinking that anyone who didn't belong to my church would go to hell.

The gifts of openness and acceptance from others that I have received since I created the Sacred Wheel of Peace (a mandala that honors all spiritual paths and cultures,

1999) has come to me from all corners of the world. I gratefully accept all of their blessings.

Writing has also been a gift that has opened many doors to my spirit. I get to see myself in black and white—the good, the bad, and the ugly. This has now become a morning meditation. Most days I sit with my laptop from six to seven a.m. and I write. Never did I dream that anything I had to say would end up in a book, but it did, and that is scary. I have allowed myself to be vulnerable in public. I have opened myself to review and rejection in a whole new way. I have acknowledged my fears, on paper, for the whole world to see, but I have learned to let the next moment arrive and not wallow in them.

I have also opened the door that allows people to support me. I no longer have to live by the tenet, "I can do this myself, thank you." The scary parts are about getting sick, not having enough money, and being lonely. These all come to me from time to time, and all I have to do at those moments is acknowledge the reality of my fear and then wait for the next moment.

I am comfortable saying, "If I drop dead today I will have no regrets because I am able to live each moment and each moment is a wonderful gift." I have been blessed to have seventy years filled with amazing moments and for that I am grateful. My prayer for the rest of my life, and for you, is my own version of the Serenity Prayer:

Let me be granted the gift of acceptance,
The serenity to recognize the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.

William Walsh

Comfortable With Uncertainty

Pema Chödrön

The Love That Will Not Die

Spiritual awakening is frequently described as a journey to the top of a mountain. We leave our attachments and our worldliness behind and slowly make our way to the top. At the peak we have transcended all pain The only problem with this metaphor is that we leave all others behind. Their suffering continues, unrelieved by our personal escape.

On the journey of the warrior-bodhisattva, the path goes down, not up, as if the mountain pointed toward the earth instead of the sky. Instead of transcending the suffering of all creatures, we move toward turbulence and doubt however we can. We explore the reality and unpredictability of insecurity and pain, and we try not to push it away. If it takes years, if it takes lifetimes, we let it be as it is. At our own pace, without speed or aggression, we move down and down and down. With us move millions of others, our companions in awakening from fear. At the bottom we discover water,

Pema Chödrön is an American Buddhist nun and one of the foremost students of Chögyam Trungpa, the renowned Tibetan meditation master. She is resident teacher at Gampo Abbey, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, the first Tibetan monastery in North America established for Westerners. She is also the author of several books including When Things Fall Apart *and* Start Where You Are. *Photo by Nancy Jo Johnson.*

the healing water of bodhichitta. Bodhichitta is our heart—our wounded, softened heart. Right down there in the thick of things, we discover the love that will not die. This love is bodhichitta. It is gentle and warm; it is clear and sharp; it is open and spacious. The awakened heart of bodhichitta is the basic goodness of all beings.

The Healing Power of Bodhichitta

Bodhichitta is a Sanskrit word that means "noble or awakened heart." Just as butter is inherent in milk and oil is inherent in a sesame seed, the soft spot of bodhichitta is inherent in you and me. It is equated, in part, with our ability to love. No matter how committed we are to unkindness, selfishness, or greed, the genuine heart of bodhichitta cannot be lost. It is here in all that lives, never marred and completely whole.

It is said that in difficult times, it is only bodhichitta that heals. When inspiration has become hidden, when we feel ready to give up, this is the time when healing can be found in the tenderness of pain itself. Bodhichitta is also equated, in part, with compassion—our ability to feel the pain that we share with others. Without realizing it we continually shield ourselves from this pain because it scares us. Based on a deep fear of being hurt, we erect protective walls made out of strategies, opinions, prejudices, and emotions. Yet just as a jewel that has been buried in the earth for a million years is not discolored or harmed, in the same way this noble heart is not affected by all of the ways we try to protect ourselves from it. The jewel can be brought out into the light at any time, and it will glow as brilliantly as if nothing had ever happened.

Comfortable with Uncertainty

Those who train wholeheartedly in awakening bodhichitta are called bodhisattvas or warriors—not warriors who kill but warriors of nonaggression who hear the cries of the world. Warrior-bodhisattvas enter challenging situations in order to alleviate suffering. They are willing to cut through personal reactivity and self-deception. They are dedicated to uncovering the basic, undistorted energy of bodhichitta.

A warrior accepts that we can never know what will happen to us next. We can try to control the uncontrollable by looking for security and predictability, always hoping to be comfortable and safe. But the truth is that we can never avoid uncertainty. This not-knowing is part of the adventure. It's also what makes us afraid.

Wherever we are, we can train as a warrior. Our tools are sitting meditation, tonglen, slogan practice, and cultivating the four limitless qualities of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. With the help of these practices, we will find the tenderness of bodhichitta in sorrow and in gratitude, behind the hardness of rage and in the shakiness of fear. In loneliness as well as in kindness, we can uncover the soft spot of basic goodness. But bodhichitta training offers no promise of happy endings. Rather, this "I" who wants to find security—who wants something to hold on to—will finally learn to grow up.

If we find ourselves in doubt that we're up to being a warrior-in-training, we can contemplate this question: "Do I prefer to grow up and relate to life directly, or do I choose to live and die in fear?"

The Wisdom of No Escape

The central question of a warrior's training is not how we avoid uncertainty and fear but how we relate to discomfort. How do we practice with difficulty, with our emotions, with the unpredictable encounters of an ordinary day? For those of us with a hunger to know the truth, painful emotions are like flags going up to say, "You're stuck!" We regard disappointment, embarrassment, irritation, jealousy, and fear as moments that show us where we're holding back, how we're shutting down. Such uncomfortable feelings are messages that tell us to perk up and lean into a situation when we'd rather cave in and back away.

When the flag goes up, we have an opportunity: we can stay with our painful emotion instead of spinning out. Staying is how we get the hang of gently catching ourselves when we're about to let resentment harden into blame, righteousness, or alienation. It's also how we keep from smoothing things over by talking ourselves into a sense of relief or inspiration. This is easier said than done.

Ordinarily we are swept away by habitual momentum. We don't interrupt our patterns even slightly. With practice, however, we learn to stay with a broken heart, with a nameless fear, with the desire for revenge. Sticking with uncertainty is how we learn to relax in the midst of chaos, how we learn to be cool when the ground beneath us suddenly disappears. We can bring ourselves back to the spiritual path countless times every day simply by exercising our willingness to rest in the uncertainty of the present moment—over and over again.

From Comfortable with Uncertainty *by Pema Chödrön, © 2002 by Pema Chödrön and Emily Hilburn Sell. Reprinted by arrangement with Shambhala Publications, Inc., www.shambhala.com.*

POETRY

Separating the Firmament

Michael S. Glaser

Each day we emerge anew
from the soup of our own chaos.

Hungry for reason and order,
we deny that, like God, perhaps,

we too live on the edge
of trial and error, always

on the brink of possibility,
always moving into the next moment

of clarity and complexity,
the next dawning of day

the next wonder
of darkness and light.

Michael S. Glaser was named Poet Laureate of Maryland in 2004. Dr. Glaser has served as head of the Division of Arts and Letters, and chair of the English Dept. at St. Mary's College of Maryland, and also serves as a Poet-in-the-Schools.

The Flute

Yakov Azriel

"And I will give the rains of your land in its season, autumn's first rain and spring's latter rain. . ." (Deuteronomy 11:14)

The arid hours come
When faith evaporates,
When dew disappears
As the summer sun, scratching
the parched, bleached sky,
Scorches the morning air.

Listen then
For the flute
That sounds the right notes, one after another,
The flute playing the melody
Of belief.

David, the shepherd boy, knew this tune
When he grazed his sheep;
his flute's tune yet echoes from Jerusalem's hills,
Beyond green pastures and still waters,
Beyond the valley of the shadow.

His flute is heard
As loud as a still small voice;
And as its melody ascends,
Faith descends
As welcome, as blessed, as autumn's first rain.

Yakov Azriel was born in the U.S. and has lived in Israel for many years. His first book of poetry, Threads From a Coat of Many Colors: Poems On Genesis, *was published in 2005 by Time Being Books. His poems have won prizes in international poetry contests. He is now working on a volume of poems based on Psalms.*

Spiderwebs at Solstice

Bobbi Dykema Katsanis

my neighbors have all left the spiderwebs
that blossom in our porch rails;
we could find no better decoration
than such delicate handspun lace,
both practical and beautiful,
gathering morning dew
and sparkling like a curtain full of stars.

today, in a web I saw
one of my own long honey-colored hairs
deftly incorporated into the design:
abstraction, innovation
are not unknown to spiders.

such beauty in the margins
will bless all who live among it,
who can simply let it be.

Bobbi Dykema Katsanis is working on her doctorate in Art and Religion at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. Her chapbook, The Magdalene's Notebook, *was recently released by Finishing Line Press.*

Colin Ahern

Reflections on Reflections

Jane S. Rechtman

It is early fall. Summer seems long ago. If I were still at the beach or camping, would it still feel like summer? The answer, I know, is no—even if my teacher's life were as lazy as in mid-summer, it wouldn't be the same and I know it. The crickets at night sound different. The breeze feels less like a reprieve from the heat and more like a gentle message from the winter reminding me of what's to come. The trees haven't changed yet. They're still green but it's a different green than summer green. It's not new, tender green, it's a green that's been around for awhile, older, experienced. Does it know that it will fade? Does it know that soon it will change and die? The light is different too. A duskier, huskier ripe heaviness of autumn light is beginning to slant and glow as it reflects off the trees and bushes.

I think it's the light that has changed the most and changes me. I feel like a plant leaning towards the

Jane S. Rechtman is the co-author and editor of two books, A Compendium of Readings on World Religions *and* The Word Book: God, Sin and All That Stuff, *published by the Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education. She teaches world religions and bioethics at The Masters School where she holds the Henry Sloan Coffin Chair of Religious Studies. Jane has an M.Div. and a Certificate in Medical Humanities.*

sun. My body wants to soak up as much sun-energy as I can to use during the light-starved days of winter. In some real ways that's what summer does for us: stores energy. People often complain that teachers—and students—are lucky because we get to take the summer off. We are. What they may not realize is how much we really need that time to recharge our psychic batteries. Recreation time allows us to re-create ourselves so that we have the energy we need during the school year. By June we are depleted and need that time again.

Shabbat does that on a weekly basis. From Friday evening to Saturday evening we have a period of rest: a time set aside during which one is not supposed to work, run errands, or get distracted by everyday life. It's a time for spiritual re-creation, for reflection, like a spiritual summer every seven days. And, interestingly enough, it's marked off at the beginning and the end by light: the light of candles.

At this time of the year Jews will celebrate Rosh Hashanah, the birthday of the world. It is a time set aside to celebrate the life force around us, to marvel and to reflect on the sweetness of life. Just as the beginning of a new school year, when we are refreshed and rejuvenated, is a good time to ponder on who we are and what is around us, so is Rosh Hashanah. A Hasidic rabbi, Nachman of Bratslau, wrote this following prayer in the late 1700s:

> Master of the universe, grant me the ability to be alone; may it be my custom to go outdoors each day among the trees and grass—among all living things—and there may I be alone and enter into prayer, to talk to the One to whom I belong. May I

express there everything in my heart, and may all the foliage of the field—all grass, trees and plants—awake at my coming, to send the powers of their life into the words of my prayer so that my prayer and speech are made whole through the life and spirit of all growing things, which are made as one by their transcendent Source.

Students often ask me what I think G-d is. My answer is I don't know. But I believe I see reflections of G-d every day in every way. It is in these changes of the seasons and the changes in a person. That life-energy force that transformed a one-celled water creature into my baby, then into a boy who became a thinking, shaving teenager, is an awesome power. One day, hopefully, that transforming life force will change my son into a father and finally a shrinking old man with few teeth but many memories. That changeable energy, that transforming life force that enlivens him is, to me, G-d.

When I look at the trees I see G-d. Roots spreading deep below the surface reaching tentacles down for nutrients that then get sucked up into the farthest, highest branches. Leaves waving in the wind and, at this time of the year, glowing with the reflected light from the slanted sun. In the winter new growth will begin when the light changes yet again and the sap flows. These amazing energy exchanges are part of what I call G-d.

When I think about Moses at a burning bush, the Buddha under a tree, Jesus at a river, Muhammed in a cave, or Lao Tzu in the mountains, I do believe they have had an experience with that nature-force called G-d. But I also believe it can happen to any one of us

who sits on the edge of the ocean at night and watches the moon and stars or a group of people who, either through song and dance or calm quietude, feel the spirit of G-d alight upon them.

G-d can be embodied in each one of us as well. In the Christian experience this creative force becomes personalized in the life and death of Jesus, who by sharing human experience, sharing human pain and overcoming human death, understands what we go through. Hindus recognize the divine in each one of us by bowing and saying *namaste* (the Divine in me bows to the Divine in you). Quakers see a divine light in each one of us. And the Sufi mystic, Rumi, likened the divine in us to the breath through a flute. They both make beautiful sound.

I believe G-d is in those moments—sometimes brief—when there is abundant love and kindness. An old Jewish saying says that the *Shekinah*, the spirit of G-d, is there when a husband and wife embrace. I think it was there in those times that my mother had her arm around me and read to me, as it is when I have my arms around my children. It is there when someone helps a stranger, or an orphan, or anyone in need.

I go to synagogue and I celebrate all the Jewish holidays. Both our sons had Bar Mitzvahs. But for me, the vehicle of Judaism is just that. It is a way—not the way. It is a language with a grammar and a vocabulary I can use to communicate, but it's not the only language. And like any language, it has its limitations. We use analogies or metaphors for speaking about G-d in Judaism. But they are just metaphors and they aren't the only ones that work and they don't show the whole picture.

As we start this new year, as we get into our year's busy schedules and the stresses of work, social lives, errands, responsibilities, set aside some time—each day and each week—to get in touch with that creative energy force inside you and outside you. Whether you do it alone or with others, through prayer or meditation, with music or with silence, at a communal place or in the woods, be in touch with that spirit. Whether you call it nature, G-d, Shekinah, Jesus, the divine light, chakra energy, chi, Allah, the Force, or simply love and goodness, be in touch with that which makes life wondrously beautiful and creative. Nurture it, share it, and be nurtured by it. To be aware of and tapped into cosmic energy is like a light bulb using electricity. If each one of us took the time to be fed by and to feed the spark of creative energy inside us, the potent force would be truly awesome.

Matt McInerney

PRAYERS

Jewish Prayer

And God saw everything that He had made,
and found it very good. And He said:
This is a beautiful world that I have given you.
Take good care of it, do not ruin it.
It is said: Before the world was created,
the Holy One kept creating worlds
and destroying them. Finally He created this one,
and was satisfied. He said to Adam:
This is the last world I shall make.

I place it in your hands: hold it in trust.

Challenges

Chief Dan George, Tse-lal-Watt Sioux

May the stars carry your sadness away,
May the flowers fill your heart with beauty,
May hope forever wipe away your tears,
And, above all, may silence make you strong.

Sandra H. Bounds lives in Macon, a farming community in east central Mississippi. She was the Mississippi Poetry Society 2005 Poet of the Year, and MPS published an anthology of her work, From a Secret Bower. *Sandra's poems have appeared in* SACRED JOURNEY *and many other journals.*

Plea for Hope

Sandra H. Bounds

Out of the turbulence
of my own soul,
I can only lean toward You
in hopeless hunger.

With wordless cries,
I beseech You.
Calm my storms.
Renew within me
Your Living Hope.

Let Us Be United

from the Rig Veda (Hindu)

Let us be united,
Let us speak in harmony,
Let our minds apprehend alike.
Common be our prayer,
Common be the end of our assembly,
Common be our resolution,
Common be our deliberations.
Alike be our feelings,
Unified be our hearts,
Common be our intentions,
Perfect be our unity.

Better in the Soul

Meredith Jordan

This story began with a late afternoon call from the minister of Unity Church of Maine, asking me to cover the sermon for a worship service one Sunday she was planning to be away. I hesitated. But of course, Spirit was at work behind the scenes, promptly providing me with inspiration in the form of a client who brought me a sacred story worthy of our collective attention. I accepted.

The story was this. My client's sister, generally a hard-edged person who could be—let's say—unkind to others, had separated from her husband and had been diagnosed with an aggressive, commonly fatal, form of cancer within less than a week. The sister had a long and painful history of animosity with several members of her family, including this client. As a result, she was estranged to some degree from many of them. My client has lived a hard life herself, and has discovered through challenges of her own when it is best to be scrappy, and when it is best to leave matters to wiser hearts than

Meredith Jordan is co-founder of Rogers McKay, a non-profit, multifaith educational organization, and is the author of Embracing the Mystery: The Sacred Unfolding in Ordinary People and Everyday Lives. *She has a professional counseling and spiritual direction practice. Her new book is* Standing Still: Hearing the Call to a Spirit-Centered Life. *To learn more, visit www.rogersmckay.org.*

hers. When she learned everything her sister was going through, her initial response was to keep a respectful distance, and to leave this sister to the natural consequences of her longtime unpleasant behavior. Exactly what that meant, even my client was uncertain.

However, before she took this step to back away, she asked a question that impacted both of us powerfully: "Is there any possibility that all this could help her become better in the soul?"

Better in the soul. I'd never heard the term or thought of the concept in precisely that way, but her words struck a deep, unexpected chord of truth in both of us. We sat in stunned silence with that stark question: *Was it possible that all this bad news, this deluge of painful events, could help an unusually difficult person become better in the soul?*

It was a question that *belonged* in this conversation about whether to reach out to her sister or pull back—a question that couldn't be overlooked. Or if overlooked, it was evident that this fleeting window of opportunity for the sister to alter her life course, as well as her present relationships with family members, could be lost forever. I finally broke the silence with something so obvious we both laughed, "Of course! It's always possible for bad events to lead us into good places. We can use any circumstances, at any place and any time, to help us become better in the soul. It's always a matter of choice, and what we do with what we are given."

Spirituality 101. Elizabeth Kubler Ross, the ferocious pioneer of work in the field of death and dying used to say, "Who you are is God's gift to you. What you make of yourself is the gift you give back to God."

The client looked at me with one of those big grins that says so much in a simple expression. We both knew what she had to do, and, as I recall, the conversation immediately moved into how to do it and how to do it well. No more dwelling on *what* to do or *why*. It was just the right thing—obvious to both of us—to get involved in her sister's life and to provide the support and love she could—open to helping, yet still aware that she might have to draw her boundary at any moment that her sister's behavior proved too difficult.

Over some months since this question was first asked, my client's sister has blossomed and begun a new life (although not without some rough edges). "Chemotherapy school," another term coined by this client, isn't an easy school to be in, and the homework's really hard, even when the chances to learn are notable. Driving her sister to chemotherapy school, sitting with her during treatments, helping her in the days following her treatments, my client hasn't had to protect herself in any way. There's been a softening between them, and they're carving out a true sisterhood for the first time in years, both becoming *better in the soul* as a result of risking and forging a fresh relationship with each other. According to my client, cancer and chemotherapy school have a way of making very clear what is, and what is not, important.

So the question that has been rattling around inside my spirit for some time now, the question the Mystery has raised with me and asked me to raise with others, is this: *What does it mean to become better in the soul, and how do we get there?*

Jack Kornfield is a practicing Buddhist as well as a meditation teacher and an author of wide reputation.

Early in his book *A Path With Heart* he describes one of his own significant lessons as a spiritual seeker: that all we ever hope to embody or teach others about living a spirit-centered life must first pass through us, acknowledged, absorbed, and integrated into our singular lives. Only when we *live* our lessons have we developed a wisdom that indicates we are ready to teach them to others. In simple terms, the universal work always begins with the personal.

Kornfield writes: "I have learned that the universal must be wedded to the personal to be fulfilled in our spiritual life. We are human beings, and the human gate to the sacred is our own body, heart, and mind; the history from which we come; and the closest relationships and circumstances of our life. If not here, where else could we bring alive compassion, justice, and liberation?"

Kornfield tells us that the particularities of our lives are neither random nor purposeless: they come to illuminate the gate that opens from the human into the sacred realms. They come to show us the way. Thus, these "particularities," however much we want or despise them, are eminently meaning- and opportunity-filled. We are always given the choice to approach and accept them, or to avoid them and turn away. To say "yes" or to say "no." And since the Mystery bears no judgment of our choices (it just makes them available, and if we let them pass us by, allows them to be received by someone else), we are, in the truest sense, agents of free will when we arrive at the decision to become better in the soul.

To say "no" means that we stay as we are, in whatever life we have made our own. It gets no bigger; it gets no

smaller. Our spirits grow no bigger; they grow no smaller. It's the kind of spiritual stasis we can choose—sometimes out of fear, sometimes out of exhaustion, sometimes out of pain or apathy—without reproach.

To say "yes" means that we are ready to live triumphantly, which isn't a promise that we'll never be hurt again or have shards to pick out of our human wounds. It just means that we say, "Yes! Give me life, and I want all of it. I want to be here for my life, for all its loves and losses. I want to show up for all parts of it, to learn and to grow from it, and, ultimately, to give back some of what I've learned in the form of wisdom to those who follow me." The result of saying "Yes!" is both laughter and love, sorrow and bleeding: a rich journey through our time on earth, in a life well and fully inhabited.

If there is no great negative—except for spiritual stasis—to saying "no," why should we say "yes?" The answer is simple: because the world needs us to do it, because the children of the present and the grandchildren of the future require it of us, because the family of creation waits for us to do our part in its expansion or movement toward awakening more and more fully. "If not me, then who? If not now, then when?"

What's my message? Love the particularities of your life, however hard or gentle they may seem, however uplifting or despairing. Love them all; embrace them all. They are your gate to the sacred, your threshold to becoming better in the soul. Honor them as the opportunity they are for you to mature and grow spiritually. Our chances to grow come as they come, not always in forms we want to accept, but they come, and if we don't turn away, we can be greatly en-spirited by the gifts they hold out to us.

Nothing comes to us without the intention for us to grow better in the soul. We're born to embody the extravagant heart of divinity, and absolutely everything that life hands to us contains the opportunity—yours or mine to accept—for us to step more consciously into the choice to fully inhabit that inborn divinity.

Friends: I bow to the sacred within you. I humbly invite you to flaunt your fears and resistances—whatever they are, and we all have them—and step out, just step out, to stand in the circle with your sisters and brothers of all faiths who are quietly becoming better in the soul . . . so that we might yet pass forward to the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren generations into the future, a gentler, kinder, and more compassionate home for the human family.

A River of Darkness . . . and an Island of Peace

William Vincent

There is a river of darkness running through my mind. For a very long time I have thought this darkness was an intimate part of me, and I struggled desperately to hide from it and pretend in many different ways that it was not there, that it was not I. By the grace of God, a new and powerful awareness has gradually awakened in me. I have come to realize that there is indeed a dark and menacing corner of my mind and there is also a place of light and joy and peace.

The awareness that there are two sources of thought of a radically different nature existing side by side in my mind is immensely helpful and comforting to me. As I have come to realize that there is an island of peace and joy within my mind I have found the courage to look directly at the nature of the dark place. What I have come to see so clearly is that this river of darkness does not represent anything of the truth about me, or anyone. The river is a flowing, never-ceasing current of judgment directed at whatever the mind focuses on in a given moment. In a very real sense it is not

William Vincent, MD is winding up a long and very fulfilling career as a children's cardiologist and is inspired to start a spiritual retreat center and guide small groups to holy sites on the planet. He has been a student of A Course in Miracles for 25 years.

about anyone or anything outside of me, although it always seems to be. It is about an imagined loss, a sense of separation from God, a deeply imbedded sense of guilt for the separation I have somehow caused, and the fear of the inevitable punishment for what I have done. It is the central idea that there is something fundamentally and irreparably wrong with me, for which I must sooner or later pay with my life. And it is a lie.

In a way, I shall probably never understand how I long ago accepted this river of darkness, this constant commentary of fear and distrust, as my truth, my ground of being. As the me that I know continues to emerge and expand, I begin to hear and love something else which exists in my mind. This something else, this island of peace, is none other than the Voice for God, the Holy Spirit. With each day, I find unlimited opportunities to observe what I experience in my heart as I choose to listen to the voice of fear or the Voice of Love. It remains difficult, at times impossible, to take my attention from the familiar and compelling voice of darkness and turn instead to the place of peace. It is, after all, an ancient and deeply ingrained habit which I am working to change. But I do experience many instances of success. Every time I succeed in turning my attention from this commentary of fear, and become still enough to listen to the Voice of Love, fear is replaced by peace. Darkness is replaced by light.

I am so grateful to learn that, although there is a raging torrent of negativity always moving through my mind, there is a loving and totally accepting Presence with me as well. Each instant in which I turn from the river of darkness and I choose the peace of God as my only goal I take another step toward freedom and into living in the light . . . as God created me.

BOOK REVIEWS

Please enjoy these publishers' reviews of books that have recently come across our desk.

THE ELEMENTS OF PRAYER:
Learning to Pray in Real Life
by Joe B. Jewell
New World Library, 2006
www.newworldlibrary.com
508-255-4685
800-741-6657 or 415-884-2100

In his twenty-five years as a Methodist pastor, the question people most frequently asked Joe Jewell is, "What is prayer and how does one pray?" Those who asked this question were not seeking recited-by-rote platitudes, nor longwinded sermons, nor stale pieties; they wanted to know how one can communicate to a higher power the things that really matter in one's life. *The Elements of Prayer: Learning to Pray in Real Life* offers thoughtful guidelines in response to this question.

With the understanding that prayer, like writing, is something everyone can do but which most struggle to do well, Jewell uses Strunk and White's classic guide, *The Elements of Style*, as a model for prayer. While many books about prayer offer a doctrinal approach, *The Elements of Prayer* is more fundamental, seeking to "outline rather than fill in" so that the reader can find his or her own way of praying. In ten rules of usage,

form, composition, and approach, along with a playful glossary, the book seeks to aid readers' understanding of and confidence in the art of prayer.

> You don't live anywhere but the present. So you pray to be fully in, and focused on, the present. That is why in the best known of all Christian prayers, the one Jesus presented as a model for prayer, He uses the phrase, "give us this day." It anchors our devotion to the present moment. The tense of the Lord's Prayer is present: who art, kingdom come, be done, give, forgive, lead, deliver. No promises present for future gain, no past lapses mulled over. Prayer happens now, not then. You have to be present in this moment as fully as you can. *(From Chapter One, "Rules of Usage," the seventh rule, "Pray for the present")*

"The rules are directives, not strictures," Jewell writes. "The aim is to make what seems to be an esoteric art plain and accessible. The hope is that the reader will become a 'pray-er,' able to guide others to and through this essential element of life."

Joe Jewell has over thirty years of experience as a Methodist pastor, serving in churches in small towns and large cities, with congregations ranging in size from seven to four hundred. He received a BA in philosophy and English from Vanderbilt University and a Th.M. from Boston University's School of Theology. Joe is married to best-selling author Carla Neggers. They live in Vermont, where they raised two children.

KEEP GOING:
The Art of Perseverance
by Joseph M. Marshall III
Sterling Press, 2006
www.sterlingpub.com
212-532-7160

Joseph Marshall III, author of the critically acclaimed *The Lakota Way* and *The Journey of Crazy Horse*, offers readers of his newest book, *Keep Going*, an inspirational guide deeply rooted in Lakota spirituality.

Marshall was born on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota and was raised by his maternal grandparents, speaking Lakota as his first language. He grew up listening to his grandfather's stories. Elders were respected and honored, and storytelling was an integral part of the Lakotas' life. Stories didn't just entertain, they instructed, and the stories of Marshall's grandfather taught him about character, spirituality, and life.

In *Keep Going*, Marshall draws on the wisdom and philosophy that was passed down to him from his grandfather. He offers the reader life lessons in the form of stories, history, dialogue, and recollections. When a young man's father dies, he turns to his grandfather for comfort. Together they sit underneath the family's cottonwood tree, and the grandfather shares his perspective on life, the perseverance it requires, and the pleasure and pain of the journey.

Marshall is the author of seven books. He is the recipient of many awards and honors, including the Wyoming Humanities Award, and the South Dakota Author of 2006. He is also a historian, educator, motivational speaker, and Lakota craftsman.

ONE GOOD WORK AT A TIME:
Simple Things You Can Do to Make a Difference
by Frances Sheridan Goulart
Sorin Books, 2006
www.sorinbooks.com
800-282-1865

This upbeat, spirited guidebook is filled with ideas, inspiration, encouragement, and concrete resources you can use—including websites, interest groups, activities, books, and more—to help you make a difference in the world, and your soul, one good work at a time.

This book includes ideas for good works in prayer, the home, the workplace, the local community, the environment, and the global community. It lists web sites, addresses and phone numbers for prayer sites, not-for-profit social networks, environmental products and companies, and more.

Here is a sampling of what you will find inside:

"Power Praying for Peace": Receive a peace prayer via email twice daily to pray with others around the globe. Visit www.prayforpeace.com.

"Bell, Book, and Zafu": Start your calendar day with The Christian Planning Calendar (from Morehouse Publishing, www.morehousepublishing.org) which cites all religious observances and seasons for Protestant, Anglican, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Islamic, and Jewish faiths, as well as secular holidays.

Author Frances Sheridan Goulart has written more than 15 books, including *God Has No Religion* (Sorin Books). She is a columnist for *Kerux,* the newsletter of Pax Christi Metro New York, and her articles have appeared in a variety of spiritual publications.

ENDPIECE

The Energy of Prayer

Thich Nhat Hanh

When we pursue the objects of sensual desire, such as money, fame, power, and sex, we are not able to produce true happiness. Rather, we create a great deal of suffering for ourselves and for others. Human beings are full of desires. Day and night, they run after these desires, and therefore they are not free. If they are not free, they do not feel at ease and they do not feel happy. If we have few desires, we are satisfied with a simple, wholesome life and we have the time to live deeply every moment of daily life and to love and look after our dear ones. That is the secret of true happiness. In our present society, far too many people are looking for happiness by satisfying their sensual desires. The quantity of suffering and despair has greatly increased.

Perhaps, really, all energy of prayer comes back to our simple human desire for happiness and being connected both to other people and to something greater than ourselves. Prayer, whether silent, chanted, or in meditation, is a way to return to ourselves in the present moment and touch the peace within us. It is, simultaneously, a way to put us in touch with the universal and the timeless. Our true happiness comes from being fully conscious in the present moment, aware of our connection to everything in the universe.

Thich Nhat Hanh is a world-renowned Vietnamese Buddhist monk. This piece is reprinted from Thich Nhat Hanh's The Energy of Prayer: How to Deepen Your Spiritual Practice *(Parallax Press, 2006) www.parallax.org.*

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